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C O N F I D E N T I A L ISLAMABAD 001148

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TAGS: PGOV ECON PREL PK

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH POTENTIAL NEW MINISTER OF FINANCE
MOHAMMED ISHAQ DAR

Ref: Islamabad 924

Classified by: Ambassador Anne W. Patterson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) Summary: In a March 6 meeting with the Ambassador, Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N) Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar, whose name has been cited as a potential PML-N Minister of Finance, discussed his relationship with Benazir Bhutto and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), and emphasized that the next government should put "personal motives" aside and work solely for the people of Pakistan. Ambassador brought up the key economic challenges for the next government; Dar emphasized the need for transparency for the military budget and subsidies. End summary.

Next government should be "100 percent for Pakistan"

¶2. (C) Ambassador met with potential Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz Finance Minister candidate Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar March 6. Dar emphasized that regardless whether PML-N or PPP assumes the Prime Minister position, that person should devote himself "100 percent to the people of Pakistan" and that there should be no "self-motivation," explaining no financial gain for individual officials. He also emphasized his role beginning in 2002 to bridge differences between Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif. He was particularly proud of his work on the "Charter of Democracy." He commented that he continues to work with Asif Zardari following Bhutto's assassination. He thought that he would not be chosen as Financial Minister despite his qualifications since "others should be given a turn."

No details on key economic issues

¶3. (C) The Ambassador raised the key economic issues facing the new government, including subsidies, the budget deficit, energy, and the military budget. On subsidies, Dar opined that the Musharraf government has not been transparent. He also was adamant that the military budget be considered by Parliament as more than a single line item in the interest of greater transparency. In his view, the current government has spent far too much on military salaries. In response to the Ambassador's offer to help facilitate organization of an investment conference focused on energy infrastructure, Dar agreed this was a worthwhile venture.

Comment

¶4. (C) Comment: As a former Minister of both Commerce and Finance, a chartered accountant, and former Director at the International Monetary Fund, Asian Development Bank, and the Islamic Development Bank, Dar has impressive economic policy credentials. However, particularly in comparison with PPP's potential Finance Minister Syed Naveed Qamar (reftel), he was short on specifics and quickly reoriented the conversation back to his past accomplishments when questioned directly. However, Dar was keenly aware of the many economic challenges facing the new government. End comment.

PATTERSON